

Media, Pennsylvania— On Monday, September 24, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07), a member of the House Armed Services Committee, held the 7th District's first Veterans Summit at Delaware County Community College in Media, PA. — "As someone who wore the cloth of this nation for 31 years, few things are more important to me than our obligation to support our veterans and their families. I held today's Veterans Summit because I believe it is critical that veterans know about and receive the full benefits they are entitled when they return home. My second objective was to listen to veterans from my District to better understand their issues and what their concerns are, so I can best advocate for them down in Washington," said Congressman Sestak. "The needs of our veterans vary greatly, from who fought in World War II to those who are serving now in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. We have a moral obligation to keep our promises to those who have kept their promise to defend our nation".

The Veterans Summit was composed of four main panels exploring: 1) veterans health care, 2) veterans benefits and insurance programs, 3) veterans educational and business opportunities, and 4) other veteran issues. The summit drew over 250 participants from numerous veterans groups from across the District, including Blue Star Mother's of America, an organization of mothers who have, or have had, children honorably serving in the military.

Key administrators and staff from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office and Insurance Center attended the Veterans Summit to engage with the local veterans and provide information about the types of services and resources they provide. Additionally, the event included opportunities for local veterans to network and build relationships with one other, creating a support structure where veterans can help other veterans. Finally, the Veterans Summit provided an opportunity for local veterans to engage and provide feedback to the Congressman on how to best advocate for their needs and interest. It also included the inaugural meeting of Congressman Sestak's Veterans

During the Veterans Summit, Congressman Sestak spoke about the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress, which was created in 2000 by the United States Congress to collect and archive the personal recollections of U.S. wartime veterans to honor their service and share their stories. Representative Sestak has been instrumental in raising awareness about this Veterans History Project and has encouraged local veterans and area high school students to participate in a "recollection collection drive."

"It is important that we work closely to record the thoughts and recollections of our veterans to ensure that future generations, particularly our students, have access to the memories and experiences of veterans acquired during their service to the nation," said Congressman Sestak. "These individual stories will provide historians with invaluable information to give context to some of the greatest moments in our history and some of the most tragic. Just as important, it will provide the public with a way to remember and celebrate the sacrifices made by the men and women who have fought to protect our freedom."

Since he has been in Congress, Congressman Sestak has fought for the men and women who have served and who are currently serving in our armed forces. He recently supported the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill which provided the largest single increase to the Veterans Administration budget in its 77 year history -- \$6.7 billion additional dollars for the Veterans Administration. With passage of this bill, the 110th Congress has voted for historic increases in veterans' health care and benefits programs, totaling nearly \$12 billion (including the joint resolution and the supplemental), to meet the needs of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and make up for the Bush Administration's past shortcomings in its treatment of veterans. Specifically, the bill: Provided historic funding for the Veterans' Administration, increasing its budget \$6.7 billion over last year's level; strengthened Veterans' Mental Health Services, including an additional \$600 million for mental health -- including post-traumatic stress disorder and brain injuries; strengthened our military by including an unprecedented \$21.4 billion for military construction; and enhanced accountability. This legislation will ensure that the 1,145,918 veterans in Pennsylvania receive care worthy of their sacrifice.

Additionally, for the first time, the budget for VA medical care exceeds the budget of the veterans' service organizations by \$294 million. This will ensure quality health care for 5.8 million patients, including about 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, which the VA will treat in FY 2008. It also significantly reduces the 400,000 claims backlog for veterans waiting for disability and other benefits by adding more than 1,100 new claims processors. Finally, it provides funding for maintenance of VA health care facilities (funding is \$500 million above the President's request) to prevent a Walter Reed-type scandal from occurring. This funding is crucial, as a recent VA report outlined 1,000 specific problems at VA health facilities around the country, with a backlog of \$5 billion in maintenance.

Congressman Sestak has also successfully passed two amendments to H.R. 1538, the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act, which will improve mental health care for our wounded soldiers. The first amendment highlights the fact that mental health care is an essential component to the medical services offered to our Veterans and the members of our Armed Services by clarifying that 'medical care' as defined in H.R. 1538 includes mental health care services. The second amendment requires the Secretary of the Department of Defense to develop a plan to help prevent Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other stress-related psychopathologies (including substance abuse conditions) from developing in our military service members. In addition, it requires the Secretary to submit to Congress within 180 days a plan for establishing a Peer-Reviewed research program within the Defense Health Program's research and development function to research the prevention of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and how to best strengthen the psychological resiliency of our military service

members. Both amendments passed with unanimous support.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the Congress.

Veterans Summit

Monday, September 24, 2007

Delaware County Community College

Agenda

8:30 AM	REGISTRATION
9:00 AM	VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT - INTRODUCTION
9:05 AM	PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & AGENDA
9:10 AM	OPENING REMARKS by Congressman Joe Sestak
9:20 AM	VETERANS' HEALTH CARE
	Mr. Richard Citron
	Director, Philadelphia VA Medical Center
	Mr. Gary Devansky
	Director, Coatesville VA Medical Center
10:25 AM	VETERANS' INSURANCE AND BENEFITS
	Mr. Tom Lastowka
	Director, VA Regional Office & Insurance Center
11:30 AM	VETERANS' BUSINESS AND EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES
	Mr. Clyde Stoltzfus
	Director, Procurement Technical Assistance Center, Wharton
School of Business	Mr. Glenn McAllister
	Director, Widener University Small Business Development Center
(SBDC)	Mr. Sam Ficchi
	Education Liaison Representative, VA Education Center
12:15 PM	DISCUSSION OF ADDITIONAL VETERANS' TOPICS
12:45 PM	ADJOURNMENT